

The Stolen White Elephant

by
Mark Twain

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II

3 The next morning the story is in all the newspapers, in the smallest detail. There are even theories on how it happened, who the thieves are, and where they are hiding the elephant. There are eleven theories. All the theories are different, but they all agree on one thing:

The door to the elephant's room was locked and there was a large hole in the rear wall. All theories agree that the thieves made the hole in the wall to



confuse the detectives. Then they took the elephant out another way.

How clever the thieves are! They confused me too.

The eleven theories all name the thieves, but no two theories name the same thieves. There are the names of thirty-seven thieves in total. All the stories talk about the same detective: Chief Inspector Blunt:

Chief Inspector Blunt knows who the two thieves are: "Brick" Duffy and "Red" McFadden. The chief knew the robbery was going to happen and he was following the two men. Unfortunately on the night of the robbery he lost them.

Duffy and McFadden are the boldest• thieves in the profession. The chief believes that they are the men who stole the heater from the police headquarters last winter.



Glossary

- **boldest:** bravest and most sure of themselves
- **locked:** closed with a key
- **rear:** back
- **theories:** ideas to explain things

As I read the newspaper I am surprised by this strange man. Nothing is a mystery to him. I am soon at his office. I ask him why he didn't arrest the thieves before the robbery. His reply is simple:

"It is not my job to stop thieves, but to punish them. We cannot punish them until they steal something."

I say that the robbery is not a secret now because of the newspapers. Everyone can read the facts and plans and the names of thirty-seven thieves. The thieves can disguise themselves now, or go into hiding.

"That's okay. When I am ready for them I will find them. We must be friendly with the newspapers. Detectives must publish facts or people will think they have no facts to publish. We must always show the public what we are doing or they will think we are doing nothing."

"I understand. I also read that you refused to give your opinion on a certain small point."

"Yes, we always do that; it has a good effect. I don't have an opinion on that point, at the moment."

I give the inspector a large sum of money to help with the investigation and sit down to wait for news. While I am waiting I read the newspapers and the descriptions of the elephant again. It seems that the reward of twenty-five thousand dollars is only for detectives. I ask why the reward is not for everyone, and the inspector answers:

"The detectives will find the elephant. If someone else finds the animal it is because they copied the detectives and used their clues. Rewards are for people who work hard to solve a problem, not for people who find the answer by chance or luck."



Do you think the detectives are doing a good job?

What information do they have about the elephant?

What theories do they have?

What do you think has happened?

Glossary

- **arrest:** stop, and take to the police station
- **disguise:** change their clothes or appearance
- **go into hiding:** hide
- **sum:** (here) quantity
- **solve:** find the answer to

This is reasonable enough. Now the telegraphic machine in the corner begins to click. The following message is the result:

FLOWER STATION, NEW YORK, 7.30 A.M.

Have got a clue. Pound deep tracks at a farm near here. Followed them two miles east without result; think elephant went west. Will follow him in that direction.

DARLEY, Detective.

"Darley's one of the best men on the force," said the inspector. "We will hear from him again soon."

Telegram no. 2 comes:

BARKER'S, NEW JERSEY, 7.40 A.M.

Just arrived. Glass factory broken into during night, eight hundred bottles taken. Elephant must be thirsty. Bottles were empty. The only other water in large quantity near here is five miles distant. Will go there.

DARLEY, Detective.

"Interesting," said the inspector.

Glossary

- **broken into:** entered illegally
- **haystack:** pile of dried grass used to feed animals
- **force:** (here) police force
- **tracks:** marks left in the ground

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Telegram no. 3:

TAYLORVILLE, LONG ISLAND. 8.15 A.M.

A haystack near here disappeared during night. Probably eaten. A clue.

HUBBARD, Detective.

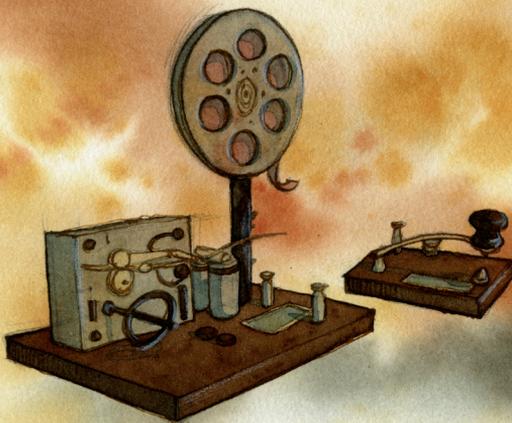
"He's moving quickly!" says the inspector. "This is a difficult job, but we will catch him."

FLOWER STATION, NEW YORK, 9 A.M.

Followed the tracks three miles west. Large and deep. Talked to a farmer who says they are not elephant tracks. They are holes he is digging to plant trees.

DARLEY, Detective.

"Aha! A gang of thieves!" says the inspector.



He writes the following telegram to Darley:

Arrest the man and force him to name the other members of the gang. Continue to follow the tracks to the Pacific Ocean, if necessary.

Chief BLUNT.

Next telegram:

CONEY POINT, PENNSYLVANIA, 8.45 A.M.

Gas office broken into here during night and unpaid gas bills taken. Is this the missing elephant?

MURPHY, Detective.

"Heavens!" says the inspector. "Does he eat gas bills?"

"Yes, but he needs other food, too."



Now comes this exciting telegram:

IRONVILLE, NEW YORK, 9.30 A.M.

Just arrived. Village in confusion. Elephant passed through here at five this morning. Some say he went east, some say west, some north, some south. He killed a horse. From horse's position, think elephant travelled north along Berkley Railway line. Has four and a half hours' start, but I'll follow him at once.

HAWES, Detective

I am very happy but the inspector doesn't change his expression. He calmly touches his bell.



Which of the telegrams give real information about the elephant?

Read the telegrams again. Which of the following are often left out?

a Pronouns

b Verbs

c Nouns

Glossary

- **bills:** papers showing how much you must pay
- **force:** (here) make
- **unpaid:** that are not paid
- **has four and a half hours' start:** the elephant started moving four and a half hours before Hawes started

After Reading Comprehension

1 Are the following sentences true (T) or false (F)? Tick.

- | | T | F |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a) The narrator is a young man. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b) The narrator and the elephant travel by ship to New York. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c) When the elephant disappears the narrator calls Inspector Blunt. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d) Inspector Blunt asks for a lot of information about the elephant. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e) The elephant's real name is Jumbo. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f) Inspector Blunt doesn't offer a reward for the elephant. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| g) Inspector Blunt puts a lot of policemen on the case. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| h) The story of the missing elephant is in all the newspapers. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| i) Inspector Blunt is angry that the newspapers know about the elephant. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| j) Lots of telegrams arrive with clues about the elephant. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| k) All of the telegrams give reliable information about the elephant. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| l) The narrator gives all his money to the Inspector. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| m) The elephant is dead when they find him. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| n) The narrator joins the police force at the end of the story. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

2 Choose the correct answers.

a) Brick Duffy and Red McFadden are

- 1 detectives
- 2 reporters
- 3 thieves

b) Inspector Blunt thinks they

- 1 have information on the elephant.
- 2 stole the elephant.
- 3 told the reporters about the elephant.

c) Brick Duffy and Red McFadden

- 1 are not alive.
- 2 are in prison.
- 3 work with Barnum's Circus.

3 *The Stolen White Elephant* is a comedy, yet it also has many sad elements. Find a passage in the story that you find funny and one that you find sad.

a)

b)

4 Read the telegrams that Detective Darley sends. Now write a description of what he does and where he goes to find the elephant.